

Opportunity Five: Empower districts to drive toward student goals.

We believe the state's primary role is to support districts and incentivize the right outcomes, rather than directly manage classrooms. Under this theory of action, we are increasing the tools, data, and supports available for districts. Through the district accountability framework, we are encouraging districts to ensure that all their students are learning and that their classrooms meet the school-level accountability that ESSA and Tennessee state law requires. We are also providing opportunities for districts to take their strengths further.

What we have started under our strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*, and how we will build on this work through ESSA:

- **Aligning our state goals and systems**

The goals in *Tennessee Succeeds* can only be achieved if districts take on this work and make it their own and if all of the state's systems are driving toward the same outcomes. As part of that work, the department is aligning its comprehensive monitoring processes via ePlan, the online planning and grants management system for districts. The department is also helping to inform decisions on initiatives and investments—for example, we are now asking districts to share how they will address teacher equity issues or low performance of their students with disabilities in the needs assessment in ePlan.

- **Equipping districts and sharing best practices while spurring innovation**

In September, the department provided directors of schools with a district strategies document that was tailored to each individual district. The document provided a series of local data points, comparison metrics, and ideas about targeted strategies that districts could consider within each priority area that would drive student and school improvement and success. This strategies document will become an annual tool for improvement, and the department will provide new competitive grants for districts to continue to push and innovate in areas of strength.

- **Helping districts maximize funding**

The single-greatest need identified by Tennessee districts is for additional fiscal resources, particularly around funding changes and program sustainability. To help districts fully leverage their flexibility for how they fund programs, the department released a coordinated spending guide so districts can better streamline spending across federal, state, and local resources, maximizing the overall funding that districts receive. The department will revise the guide to comply with ESSA, helping districts use their funding flexibility to support their students while encouraging innovation.

- **Supporting districts through regional offices**

Regional support offices, called Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE), work most closely with our districts. CORE offices also include regional specialists, and the department will work with TNTP to train all CORE English language arts consultants to build their understanding of the instructional practices that are influencing current reading achievement and support them in targeting improvements.

- **Providing opportunities to personalize learning for students and teachers**

The department will continue and expand upon several initiatives that can help districts tailor learning, including blended learning models, which combine in-classroom learning and online coursework; competency-based learning pilots, which allow students to move through a course based on mastering the content, not on the amount of time spent; and micro-credentialing, which offers educators the chance to develop and earn recognition for demonstrating specific skills. In addition, the department will continue to provide opportunities for educators to learn from highly effective peers through Networked Improvement Communities and provide opportunities for educators to gain more insight into the out-of-school challenges their economically disadvantaged students face through poverty simulations.

- **Sharing clearer information about schools' performance**

Beginning in school year 2017-18, every school will receive a summative letter grade (A-F) that is aligned to Tennessee's district accountability framework under ESSA and required by a new Tennessee state law. This system will value both student growth and student achievement, providing parents, educators and stakeholders an easy-to-understand summative overview of their schools and a baseline for comparison. This system will also value multiple measures, including students' overall achievement and growth on state assessments, graduation rates, participation rates on state assessments, students' progress in achieving English language proficiency, and the Ready Student and Opportunity to Learn indicators. There will be multiple ways to show success, and all schools will have the opportunity to earn an "A."

What does this mean for district and school administrators and teachers?

- District leaders are receiving tailored information from the department about their performance—relative to the state and their peers—and ideas for strategies that may drive improvement.
- District administrators will have access to more streamlined planning and funding information in ePlan, encouraging them to think through ways to streamline their work and tie investments back to our bigger goals.
- Districts will receive more guidance on ways they can maximize and flexibly use their federal, state, and local funding to support their students.
- Districts will have the opportunity to work with regional specialists, particularly in English language arts, to improve instructional practices around reading.
- Educators may receive more individualized learning opportunities, such as through micro-credentialing and opportunities to network with peers.

What does this mean for students and families?

- Families will have clearer, easy-to-understand feedback about how schools are performing.
- Students may have opportunities to participate in innovative pilot programs, such as competency-based learning models that let them move through a course at the pace that works for them.